

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 MANAMA 01103 01 OF 02 040218Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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P 031231Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3329

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAMA 1103

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MASS, BA

SUBJECT : MIDDLE EAST FORCE SECURITY ASSISTANCE

REF : MANAMA 1090 AND STATE 185030

SUMMARY: IN AUGUST 3 MEETING FOREIGN MINISTER, SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF BOTH AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER, INDICATED A CONTINUING RULING FAMILY HOPE THAT SOME WAY MIGHT BE FOUND TO PRESERVE BAHRAIN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. NAVY AS ONE OF MANY MANIFESTATIONS OF OVERALL US-BAHRAIN RELATIONS. AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, GOB SEES INSUFFICIENT CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAD PROMPTED ITS SETTING 1977 DEADLINE FOR NAVY'S DEPARTURE TO WARRANT A FAVORABLE RESPONSE TO U.S. REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION. POSSIBLY AS ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS OF US-BAHRAIN COOPERATION DEVELOP, INCLUDING PERHAPS IN AREA OF MODERNIZING BAHRAIN'S DEFENSE FORCE, GOB WILL BE ABLE TO SEE ITS WAY CLEAR TO EXTENDING NAVY PRESENCE. IT WILL IN ANY EVENT KEEP OUR REQUEST UNDER CONSIDERATION OVER COMING MONTHS. GOB UNDERSTANDS TIME PRESSURE BUILDING UP ON NAVY AND REGRETS THIS, BUT TO GRANT AN EXTENSION NOW WOULD BE "PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE".

1. AT HIS REQUEST I SPENT AN HOUR WITH FOREIGN MINISTER AUGUST 3 DISCUSSING MIDDLE EAST FORCE STATUS AND ITS POSSIBLE RELATION TO SECURITY ASSISTANCE. I GAVE HIM BACKGROUND OF MY RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER AND AMIR ON THIS QUESTION. HE INDICATED FULL AWARENESS OF THIS BACKGROUND (BEING CAREFUL NOT TO REVEAL WHEN HE HAD LEARNED IT), ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE AND AMIR

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PAGE 02 MANAMA 01103 01 OF 02 040218Z

HAD BEEN IN TELEPHONE DISCUSSION WITH PRIME MINISTER ON THIS

QUESTION AND CONFIRMED THAT HE WAS NOW CONVEYING ON BEHALF OF AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER AN INTERIM GOB RESPONSE TO OUR REQUEST (STATE 185030) FOR AN EXTENSION OF DEADLINE ON NAVY DEPARTURE. (IN FILLING HIM ON ALL BACKGROUND I MADE POINT OF COVERING THE TALKING POINTS IN THAT INSTRUCTION AS WELL AS THE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS I HAD MADE TO AMIR (MANAMA 1090) AUGUST 1.)

2. REVIEWING THE HISTORY OF THE NAVY PRESENCE, INCLUDING GOB'S 1973 AND 1975 DECISIONS TO TERMINATE IT, FOREIGN MINISTER MADE DISTINCTION BETWEEN OCTOBER 1973 DECISION, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "MADE IN HASTE AND EMOTION", AND THE LATTER ONE. HE NOTED GOB'S SATISFACTION THAT IT HAD BEEN ABLE TO IN EFFECT WITHDRAW ITS EARLIER DECISION BUT ADDED THAT THE DECISION IN THE SUMMER OF 1975 HAD BEEN BASED ON A CAREFUL ASSESSMENT OF BAHRAIN'S INTERESTS, INCLUDING ITS DESIRE FOR A HEALTHY LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. FOREIGN MINISTER ADDED THAT ALTHOUGH USG HAD MADE UNDERTAKING TO WITHDRAW MIDDLE EAST FORCE WITHIN SIX MONTHS IF REQUESTED, GOB HAD MADE SPECIAL POINT IN 1975 OF GIVING U.S. NAVY TWO YEARS TO WITHDRAW AS A GESTURE OF THE IMPORTANCE IT ATTACHES TO THE OVERALL US-BAHRAIN RELATIONSHIP. SINCE THEN NOTHING HAS CHANGED IN TERMS OF DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL OPINION WHICH WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY RELIEVE POLITICAL PRESSURE ON GOB TO HAVE THE NAVY GO.

3. I ARGUED THIS POINT, NOTING FIRST OF ALL THAT USG HAD MADE SIGNIFICANT VISIBLE PROGRESS OVER LAST YEAR IN DEVELOPING A BREADTH AND TEXTURE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH BAHRAIN WHICH PLACED THE NAVY PRESENCE IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE. I CITED ENHANCED DIPLO-MATIC PRESENCE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CULTURAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PRESENCE, NOTING AT THE SAME TIME WE HAVE BEEN QUITE FORTHCOMING IN MEETING RENT AND OTHER CONDITIONS GOB HAD LAID DOWN FOR CONTINUED NAVY PRESENCE WHEN IT DETERMINED TO RESERVE 1973 DECISION. MOREOVER, WHILE USG FULLY UNDERSTANDS ALL THE ELEMENTS OF THE DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL POLITICAL PRESSURES ON BAHRAIN WITH REGARD TO THIS ISSUE, WE FRANKLY FEEL GOB SIGNIFI-CANTLY OVER-ESTIMATES THE INTENSITY OF THESE PRESSURES. BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE REGION, IT IS OBVIOUS TO ALL THE SITUATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, INCLUDING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE THERE, HAS ALSO CHANGED IN THE LAST YEAR AND NOT PARTICULARLY FOR THE BETTER. HENCE GOB SHOULD BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 MANAMA 01103 01 OF 02 040218Z

TO BOTH COUNTRIES OF HAVING THE SYMBOLIC US PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA WHICH MIDDLE EAST FORCE PROVIDES. SINCE MIDDLE EAST FORCE IS CONVENIENTLY SITUATED IN BAHRAIN CONTINUED AVAILABILITY OF FACILITIES HERE WOULD SEEM TO SERVE A MUTUAL GOAL. THERE-FORE I FELT GOB WAS IN A POSITION TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT GESTURE TOWARD THE IMPORTANCE IT ATTACHES TO US-BAHRAIN RELATIONSHIP BY EXTENDING THE DEADLINE FOR NAVY'S DEPARTURE AT LEAST ONE YEAR.

4. FOREIGN MINISTER EXPRESSED FULL APPRECIATION OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS BUT CLAIMED THAT GOB IS IN BETTER POSITION TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESSURES ON IT THAN WE ARE. HE ADDED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS TELL US ABOUT THIS PROBLEM BUT THAT "ALL OF THEM" CONTINUE TO URGE BAHRAIN TO TERMINATE THE NAVY PRESENCE, CITING AMBASSADOR BUALI'S DEPARTURE CALL ON THE SHAH AS LATEST EXAMPLE. HE NOTED THE IRONY IN THE PLEASURE FRIENDLY GULF STATES PROFESS TO FIND IN MIDDLE EAST FORCE VISITS WHEN THEY ALL SEEM OPPOSED TO HAVING MIDDLE EAST FORCE STATIONED IN THE GULF AND GIVE NO COMFORT TO BAHRAIN FOR KEEPING IT.

5. FOREIGN MINISTER NOTED THAT WHEN AMIR, PRIME MINISTER, HE AND OTHER KEY OFFICIALS RETURN FROM OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE SUMMER TRAVEL, GOB WILL ALSO WANT TO CONSIDER WHERE, IF ANYWHERE, IT IS GOING IN MODERNIZING DEFENSE FORCE. WHEN IT HAS A BETTER GRASP OF WHAT MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN THIS IT WANTS TO LOOK AT POSSIBILITIES OF AN ARMS SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. ONE OF THE QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED IS WHETHER A SECURITY ASSISTANCE RELATIONSHIP, EVEN IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, WOULD NOT BE AS MUCH OF A "POLITICAL BURDEN" AS MIDDLE EAST FORCE. (AT THIS POINT HE REITERATED THAT HE WAS SPEAKING FOR AMIR, PRIME MINISTER AND GOVERNMENT AND NOT FOR THE "YOUNG BDF OFFICERS" WHO WOULD GRAB ANY WEAPONS THEY COULD GET FROM ANYWHERE ANYHOW.) FOREIGN MINISTER CONTINUED THAT AS THESE CON-

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PAGE 01 MANAMA 01103 02 OF 02 040220Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3330

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAMA 1103

EXDIS

SIDERATIONS CLARIFY IT WOULD INDEED BE WORTH EXPLORING WHETHER NEW ELEMENTS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN US AND BAHRAIN MIGHT BE DEVELOPED TO THE POINT WHERE POLITICAL PRESSURE AGAINST MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE MIGHT BE SUFFICIENTLY RELIEVED TO PERMIT AN

EXTENSION. THIS WOULD TAKE SOME TIME AND HENCE INTERIM RESPONSE TO OUR REQUEST MUST BE THAT GOB IS NOT IN A POSITION TO GRANT AN EXTENSION AT THIS TIME.

6. I AGAIN NOTED THE TIME PRESSURE BUILDING UP ON U.S. NAVY AND THE DIFFICULTY BOTH PARTIES WOULD HAVE GRAPPLING WITH THESE COMPLICATED ISSUES UNLESS A DECISION COULD BE TAKEN TO GIVE THE NAVY MORE TIME. FOREIGN MINISTER INDICATED HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD PROBLEM U.S. NAVY IS FACING AND REGRETS IT, BUT THAT, AFTER ALL, WE HAD MADE UNDERTAKING TO BE ABLE TO GET THE NAVY OUT IN ONLY SIX MONTHS AND DEADLINE IS STILL ALMOST A YEAR AWAY. I ALSO URGED STRONGLY THAT IF THE TONE AND QUALITY OF US-BAHRAIN RELATIONSHIP IS TO BE PRESERVED AND ENHANCED IT SEEMS TO ME PERSONALLY BOTH PARTIES SHOULD AVOID BARGAINING OVER THE NAVY PRESENCE QUESTION. FOREIGN MINISTER PROFESSED TO AGREE WHOLE-HEARTEDLY. COMMENT: WE SHALL SEE. END COMMENT.

7. IN CLOSING, FOREIGN MINISTER STRESSED THAT GOB IS NOT REJECTING FOR ALL TIME OUR REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION BUT THAT IN ITS VIEW TO GRANT IT NOW WOULD BE "PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE". IN COMING MONTHS, AS FINDINGS OF U.S. SURVEY TEAM WHICH ARRIVED TODAY TO LOOK AT PROPOSED BDF HELICOPTER FORCE BECOME AVAILABLE AND AS GOB SORTS OUT ITS THINKING ON BDF MODERNIZATION GENERALLY, GOB WILL REVIEW POSSIBILITY OF EXTENDING
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PAGE 02 MANAMA 01103 02 OF 02 040220Z

MIDDLE EAST DEADLINE. AT MOMENT, HOWEVER, HE MUST REPLY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER AND AMIR THAT OUR REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION IS PREMATURE AS FIRST STEP IN CONSIDERING THIS ISSUE.

8. COMMENT: PLOY OF REQUESTING EXTENSION OBVIOUSLY HAS NOT WORKED BUT AT LEAST WE HAVE GOB CONSIDERATION OF NAVY QUESTION BACK IN A RESPONSIBLE AND THOUGHTFUL FRAMEWORK. NEXT STEP FOR US WOULD SEEM TO BE PUSHING ON WITH HELICOPTER SURVEY REPORT, AND ONCE IT IS IN GOB HANDS, CONTINUING TO EXPLORE THE PARAMETERS OF WHAT GOB IS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING IN THE WAY OF MILITARY MODERNIZATION AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH WE MIGHT BE HELPFUL WITHIN PRESENT POLICY GUIDELINES. END COMMENT.

9. IN RESPONSE MY QUERY FOREIGN MINISTER SAID AMIR PREFERRED NOT TO DISCUSS THIS ISSUE FURTHER AT THIS TIME BECAUSE IT PAINED HIM TO SAY NO.

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